

colli antichi circumdante ochracea, lateraliter nigricante striolata, infra nigro cincta; fascia altera angusta ventrali castanea; supracaudalibus, basi caudæ rectricibusque tribus exterioribus albis, harum secunda et tertia anguste fulvo bifasciatis; reliquis pallide fuliginosis, indistincte ferrugineo limbatis, apicibus albis; quarta macula pogonii interni et externi, quinta pogonii interni alba: remigibus nigro-fuscis indistinctius ferrugineo limbatis; primæ basi tota reliquarum parte basali pogonii interni albis; cubitalibus notæo pallidioribus, apicibus albo limbatis: subalaribus albidis, ex parte irregulariter fusco fasciatis: rostro nigro, tomis pallidioribus; iride brunnea: pedibus pallide violacescenti-ochraceis. Long. tota 9"; latitudo ext. al. 18"; long. rostri et fronte 6" 7"; alæ 6"; caudæ 3" 2"; tarsi 2" 3.3"; digiti medii sine ungue 7" 7"; dig. lat. 4" 8", poll. et lin. Gall.

This Plover is nearly allied to *Cursorius* in form; but the top of the beak is less curved downwards, and the maxilla at the top is a little inflated: the nasal apertures are not oval, but rather cuneate and very much elongated. The second remex is somewhat longer than the first. The legs are very long, and scutellated on both sides. The three toes are rather lengthened, the middle and outer ones being connected by a faint indication of a membrane. The inner margin of the claw of the middle toe is distinctly dentated. The subcuneate tail consists of 12 rectrices.

The unique specimen here described was obtained near Gondokoro, on the White Nile, in the Bari country, in 5° N. lat. The bird appears to be rather rare.

III.—Notes on the Birds of Egypt. By S. STAFFORD ALLEN.

[Continued from vol. iv. p. 361.]

4. THE BUFF-BACKED HERON (*Herodias bubulcus*).

Perhaps the most conspicuous bird that catches the eye of the traveller in Egypt is the Buff-backed Heron (*Herodias bubulcus*; *Ardea russata*, Yarr. & Gould; *Bubulcus ibis*, Bonaparte), in its winter plumage of pure white, which is to be met with in flocks of from four or five to thirty, distributed all over the country.

These birds especially affect the society of cattle, and may be seen feeding about among the legs of the cows and buffaloes in the most fearless manner, like starlings in a flock of sheep, frequently perching on the backs of the lazy animals in the same way. The Arab name "Abou Gerdán" (father of flocks), the French "l'Héron Garde-bœuf," and the Latin specific appellation "*bubulcus*" all have reference to this marked peculiarity.

Contrary to the usual custom of the Herons and Egrets, most of which are piscivorous, the "Buff-backed" does not feed upon fish, but upon the various kinds of insects, particularly grasshoppers, which are so abundant in the rank herbage produced by the peculiar system of irrigation which obtains amongst the Arabs. They are consequently seldom seen near the water's edge. About dusk they retire to the trees to roost; and though I have occasionally seen them in the date-palms, they generally choose the Sycamore, or wild fig-tree, for that purpose.

It is frequently asserted that the Arabs consider this bird as *sacred*, and that killing one is looked upon as a serious offence; but I believe this is not the case, at least not in a *religious* sense. I have sometimes, on having shot one for a specimen, been reproached for so doing, much in the way that we should speak to any one who killed a robin; and I think that this more correctly represents the feeling on the point, although it is a hopeless task to try to make an Arab understand anything of an abstract nature.

During the winter the plumage of the Buff-backed Heron is of a creamy-white colour, with a small reddish-buff patch on the top of the head, the legs and feet being black. About the commencement of April, longer feathers, of a pale buff, begin to appear on the back, neck, and crest (the rest of the plumage remaining *in statu quo*). These continue to grow in length and deepen in colour until the end of May, by which time the summer dress is complete. At the same time the legs and feet change to a pale yellowish olive. The bill at all times is of an ochraceous yellow, and the irides vary in different specimens (probably according to age) from pale to bright yellow. The lore is greenish. The male is generally rather larger than the female, and the long feathers are a little more developed.

We did not meet with the nests of the Buff-backed Heron; and it seems probable that they are late breeders, as in those killed about the end of April the ovaries did not appear to be enlarged.

I purchased specimens of the eggs from the widow of the late M. Odascalchi, naturalist of Cairo, who had a large stock, and there seems no doubt of their genuineness. They are of the usual pale blue, vary considerably in size and shape, and have a very thin shell.

The Buff-backed Heron (*H. bubulcus*) is easily distinguished from the Little Egret, *H. garzetta*, even at a considerable distance, as the latter is almost invariably solitary, while its long, sharp, black bill contrasts strongly with the short, thick, yellow one of the former.

In consequence of its supposed sanctity among the Arabs, many people maintain that *H. bubulcus* is the true "Sacred Ibis," and no amount of proof to the contrary will make them think otherwise. I have never been able to hear of any one who has seen the *Ibis religiosa* in Egypt, and I only know of one instance in which the *I. falcinellus* occurred.

[To be continued.]

IV.—*Note on the Kestrel of Madagascar* (*Tinnunculus newtoni*).

By J. H. GURNEY.

(Plate II.)

THE Norwich Museum is indebted to the liberality of Mr. Edward Newton for a specimen of the *Tinnunculus gracilis* of Lesson, from the Seychelles Islands, and also for two Kestrels collected by him in Madagascar, and described under the same specific title of "*gracilis*," in 'The Ibis,' vol. iv. p. 267.

The sex of the specimen from the Seychelles Islands, above alluded to, has not been noted, but I am disposed to consider it a male bird.

The two individuals from Madagascar are both marked as males by Mr. Edward Newton.

On comparing the two Madagascar Kestrels with the spe-